

Coyote Valley Specific Plan

Greenbelt Research – Summary of Findings

1. City Council has provided clear direction and vision

From the Coyote Valley Specific Plan: *Visions and Expected Outcomes*

- Outcome #1: The plan will include Central and North Coyote for land planning and will include South Coyote in the infrastructure financing mechanism only. South Coyote (Greenbelt) is included only to determine financing and other mechanisms to secure this as a permanent Greenbelt.
- Outcome #2: The line (Greenline) between Central and South shall not be moved.
- Outcome #11: The plan must be financially feasible for private development.
- Outcome #14: The plan should seek mechanisms to facilitate the permanent acquisition of fee title or conservation easements in South Coyote

2. Significant challenges impede the implementation of this vision. These include:

a. Economic Challenges

- i. Conventional agriculture is no longer economically viable.
 - 1) Depressed markets for conventional farm products, mainly due to imports
 - 2) Rising costs of inputs: fuel, fertilizer, pesticides
 - 3) Labor: unavailable, too expensive, hard to attract and sustain in high-priced area
 - 4) Regulatory barriers: many, too expensive, too time-consuming
 - 5) Loss of processing facilities, mainly for prunes, a mainstay crop for decades
 - 6) Small parcels are inefficient and traffic impedes movement of farm machinery
- ii. Uncertainty not conducive to expansion and investment for agricultural businesses
- iii. High land prices prevent “new” farmers from buying lands within the Greenbelt
- iv. Funding for the purchase of open space and agricultural easements is limited
 - 1) Trusts and similar funders may achieve better cost-benefits on less expensive land
 - 2) Infrastructure costs of the CVSP can bear minimal additional financial burden

b. Environmental Challenges

- i. Farmers report specific areas of heavy clay soils, low nutrient soils, and other soil types that result in poor crops.
- ii. Many wells are low or non-producing and require expensive retrofitting
- iii. High nitrate levels in some wells
- iv. Around Fisher Creek in the rainy season, high ground water levels and flood-prone areas.
- v. There are 19 hazardous materials users and/or spill incidents documented on Greenbelt. Most of these are dangerous on account of Above-Ground Storage Tanks (ASTs) or Underground Storage Tanks (USTs), which may contain pesticides.
- vi. Pesticide and herbicide use may impede establishment of organic agriculture
- vii. The Greenbelt has areas of high and very high susceptibility to seismically induced liquefaction

- viii. Pressure from wildlife “pests” (e.g. ground squirrels, wild turkeys, feral pigs) towards the western hills
- ix. Impacts of some current land uses, including odors and heavy truck traffic
- x. Potential buffer and liability issues between housing, agriculture, and wildlife uses.

c. Equity Challenges

- i. Property owners, including current and retired farmers, are angry about being excluded from potential development profits and planning process
- ii. Lack of affordable housing for farm employees and for potential “new” leasing farmers
- iii. Development will destroy character of the valley; rural lifestyle will be impossible.

d. Other Challenges

- i. Regulatory coordination between City and county needs improvement

3. Significant opportunities support the implementation of the Greenbelt vision. These include:

a. Economic Opportunities and Potential

- i. An aesthetic agricultural and natural landscape, intermixed with recreational opportunities could raise homesite values and add value to surrounding urban areas
- ii. The new urbanism, mixed use, and sustainability themes of the new development would be reinforced by sustainability, multi-functional and new ruralism themes of the Greenbelt.
- iii. Increasing demand for locally grown food, organic products, and specialty crops, are a potential new agricultural market.
- iv. Increased demand for farm ‘life-style’ experiences and for on-farm educational programs suggest potential new agritourism opportunities.
- v. The diverse, high-income population of the San Jose metropolitan region is a relatively underserved and untapped market in terms of locally-grown and specialty foods.
- vi. Specific interest in Coyote Valley climate, natural resources, and proximity to markets
- vii. Property owners are willing to lease agricultural land at a fair rate
- viii. A couple of Greenbelt farms and agricultural businesses would like to continue and perhaps expand operations
- ix. Potential for expanded agricultural-related business opportunities
- x. Marketing for the rural/urban connection: rural success linked to urban needs
- xi. Small-scale agricultural models seen as feasible for this location
- xii. Socially responsible, green businesses are the wave of the future
- xiii. Participation in local economy as a public relations opportunity

b. Equity Opportunities

- i. Public benefit is a primary purpose of the Greenbelt
- ii. Only area of the County formally designated as a Greenbelt; its success could be a model for other greenbelts in the County and in the region
- iii. Potential for job creation; specialty crops support 1 employee per 1-5 acres.
- iv. Potential for agriculture-based community service and skills-training opportunities
- v. Potential for links with agricultural education, farm-to-school, and community health initiatives

c. Environmental Opportunities

- i. Maps and corresponding data for the Greenbelt area document substantial prime farmland soil in Greenbelt.
- ii. Mitigation opportunities. There are approximately 2,214 acres of land available in the Greenbelt for mitigation and restoration. 501 of those acres are potentially suitable for wetland habitat creation to mitigate for impacts to Wetlands in the Urban Reserve. This is enough suitable mitigation land to mitigate for most, if not all, of the impacts associated with the development of the Urban Reserve.
- iii. Possibility for on-farm conservation as part of mitigation requirement
- iv. Wildlife movement corridors through the Greenbelt would be valuable as mitigation for any wildlife species.
- v. Water quality generally good
- vi. Water supply should be sufficient and affordable for proposed uses
- vii. Potential for links between and augmentation of trail systems and natural habitat areas
- viii. An opportunity to celebrate sense of place and the land